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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0086
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3679
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7184
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0781
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2987
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0650
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000022

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: THAN SHWE REPORTEDLY RETURNING TO BURMA

Classified By: A/DCM Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) According to a contact at the Singapore Embassy, Senior General Than Shwe is alive and was released from Singapore General Hospital on January 8 after being treated for intestinal cancer. This source expected Than Shwe to return to Nay Pyi Taw shortly. Another reliable source confirmed that Than Shwe was discharged from the hospital today, but did not disclose his medical condition. Yesterday rumors flew around Rangoon that Than Shwe had died in Singapore. Another rumor circulated that he was in a coma and that it would be announced No. 2 General Maung Aye would replace Than Shwe as ruling General. One more rumor making the rounds is that he is partially paralyzed and will be flown to China for physical therapy. Rangoon remains quiet and calm with no extra military or police presence visible on the streets.

¶2. (C) Although no one knows for certain what has happened to Than Shwe, his unexplained absence at the high-profile Independence Day celebration indicates his medical problems were serious and no mere medical checkup. His absence at the televised celebration allowed the public to see his rumored rival, No. 2 General Maung Aye, front, center and in charge of the festivities and the country. Speculation continues on whether Than Shwe will be healthy enough to govern upon his return. Some believe that he will retire, force Maung Aye to retire with him, and hand over power to his chosen successor, Thura Shwe Mann. Others believe Than Shwe's illness has strengthened Maung Aye's position, which Maung Aye will use to consolidate his power.

¶3. (C) Although many point to No. 3 General Thura Shwe Mann as the chosen successor of Than Shwe, these rumors are based on speculation. The precedence honored at the Independence Day dinner was Maung Aye followed by Thura Shwe Mann, PM Soe Win, and Secretary 1 Lt. General Thein Sein. A popular theory holds that Thura Shwe Mann is being groomed to be Army Chief after a constitution is adopted and Than Shwe and Maung Aye move to civilian roles. One of our most reliable contacts claims Thura Shwe Mann is a professional soldier who respects the chain of command and is loyal to both of Burma's top Generals.

14. (C) whoever eventually succeeds Than Shwe, neither Maung Aye nor Thura Shwe Mann would likely suddenly embrace democracy. They both have a strong stake in the current system. Lack of any official information on Than Shwe's location or condition will keep the rumor mill churning. As the country waits, Burmese officials appear to be watching each other nervously. They must weigh moving quickly and risking reputation or not moving quickly enough and giving their rivals an advantage. They do not trust each other and fear making mistakes, which is a recipe for inaction.

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